

COMMENTARY

Start now to help incoming freshmen transition to this fall's 'Major League'



CHRISTINE HUTCHINSON

Graduation season is a great time to celebrate high school seniors going on to college, career or other plans for their future. We should also recognize eighth grade students during this time though, who made it through middle school and are about to embark on that grand journey we call high school.

Many schools host eighth grade graduation or promotion ceremonies for these students, including my school, Oregon Connections Academy. It's a great way to acknowledge students' academic accomplishments and offer them encouragement for what's ahead.

Since baseball season is also underway, I often think of middle school students advancing to high school and how this is sort of like minor league ball players getting called up to major league teams. They have to relate to new players, adjust to a new stadium, and work extra hard on their skills to compete at this next level.

For incoming freshmen, though the schedule and workload might be more intense, the rules of the game are similar and the coaches, like teachers and parents, are available and willing to help students adapt to this new team.

Moving from eighth grade to high school can bring uncertainty and anxiety for many teenagers. Freshman year is of-

ten a make-or-break year for many 14 and 15-year olds worried about the social atmosphere, procedural changes, and tougher classes.

There's a lot riding on this pivotal transition process too -- ninth graders are among the highest risk of dropping out of school, according to several studies. A report by the National High School Center describes ninth grade as a "bottleneck" year, because "more students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out."

Experts tell us students are less likely to fall off track if they have a smooth transition from middle school to high school. The Bridges Initiatives in Central Oregon are designed to help students switch from middle to high school. Researchers at Bridges explain that "helping students make a strong transition from eighth to ninth grade could make them more likely to stay on track and graduate."

So how do families plan ahead for this transition between eighth and ninth grades? Here are a few tips for families as they help prepare their student for a successful switch to their new academic and social standing:

Preview new school

Incoming freshman can familiarize themselves with teachers, students and special features by taking a virtual tour on their new high school's web-

site. Many schools also offer an in-person tour on "orientation day" for ninth graders, giving students a chance to meet teachers and counselors and wander around campus.

Look for parent meetings before the school year starts, specifically geared towards freshmen parents. If possible, parents may want to register for access to the student's online learning management system too, so they can keep track of their child's academic performance.

Peer mentors

A good way to ease the transition for middle school students is by pairing them up with a high school mentor. Older students can share advice about peer pressure, tests, teachers and more. A big brother or sister or neighbor friend already attending high school might be another good mentor for incoming freshmen.

Academic planning

This spring our online charter school sponsored eighth-grade planning parties, so our middle schoolers could develop a four-year academic plan for high school. We want our students to outline what courses they will take all four years based on their interests and goals for high school, creating a plan for their future studies.

Students and parents should sit down with a school counselor and map out a plan of coursework for the next four years.

Summer school

When families are reviewing their eighth grader's academic plan, perhaps summer school is an appropriate option to help prepare for high school. Some students may be falling behind in a subject and wish to enroll in a summer program, giving them a better chance for success going into their freshman year.

Stay connected

Over the years, high school counselors have learned students who feel connected to their new school are more likely to do well in both grades and other measurements. Getting connected means participating in extra-curricular activities, like sports, clubs or music, or exploring some other passion that helps balance out school-work.

Bigger workload, better organization

When middle schoolers make the leap to high school, the level of academic expectations increases along with the level of freedom. Sometimes students feel lost, overwhelmed, isolated -- they're going through several emotional and physical changes.

Parents can help new high schoolers learn organizational skills, including creating and sticking to a homework schedule. Incoming freshman can learn to take on more responsibility too.

Parental involvement

Children become more independent when they shift from eighth to ninth grades. According to studies by the National Middle School Association, this is the same time that parental involvement is typically declining. That's unfortunate, since students transition into high school more successfully when parents were positively engaged in their child's educational activities. Parents should make sure they understand their student's new school environment and responsibilities, so they can best help prepare students for success.

While moving up to the big league can be scary and stressful for eighth graders, the transition is also a time for excitement. Students aren't alone in this -- they have family and friends to support them, and teachers and counselors at their old and new schools happy to assist.

So, for all the eighth-grade students nervous about the future, I say it's time to join the majors and leave you with the words of baseball legend Yogi Berra: "When you come to a fork in the road, take it."

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House unanimously votes to re-pass equal pay bill

TRACY LOEW STATESMAN JOURNAL

Legislation that will ensure women are paid the same rate as men for the same work is headed to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown for her signature.

House Bill 2005, which was amended by the Senate, unanimously re-passed the House May 23.

"Oftentimes we don't get the opportunity to stand together on an issue that started out extremely contentious," said Rep. Jodi Hack, R-Salem, referring to an hours-long House debate on the bill's first version.

The legislation, called the

Oregon Equal Pay Act of 2017, expands upon existing federal law, which provides protections explicitly for women.

It requires that differences in compensation among employees must be based on job-related reasons such as merit, seniority, quantity or quality of production, workplace locations, travel, education, training or experience.

It expands protected classes beyond gender to include race, color, religion, sexual orientation including perceived or actual gender identity, national origin, marital status, disability, age and veteran status.

It also bans the practice of

screening job applicants based on their salary histories, strengthens penalties for wage discrimination violations, and adds remedies for workers facing pay disparities.

The prohibition on seeking salary history becomes effective 91 days after the Legislature adjourns. Screening and compensation discrimination provisions become effective January 1, 2019. The legislation allows actions alleging violations of the salary history inquiry provision beginning on January 1, 2024.

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